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A Framework for Linking Organizational Climate and the Adaptation of eLearning Methodologies at Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

Recent educational transformation efforts employ advances in information technology to augment face-to-face teaching methods and pedagogies. Nearly 70% of U.S. higher educational institutions reported online learning as critical to their long-term strategy, and the proportion of students in the U.S. taking at least one online course is at an all-time high. These eLearning initiatives stem from a variety of motivations including increasing access to education, accelerating learning in difficult subjects, and reducing instructional cost to individuals and society. Most chief academic officers at universities rate the learning outcomes for online education “as good as or better” than those for face-to-face instruction (Allan and Seaman, 2013). Regardless of the reason to adapt eLearning methods, in order to make effective use of information technology as an aid to facilitate learning, educators must learn and practice new skills and abilities.

The availability and effectiveness of e-learning methods does not necessarily result in the effective and broad adoption of these methods at colleges and universities. Although the relative quality of e-learning methods is widely recognized, a minority of academic leaders continue to believe that the learning outcomes for online learning are inferior to those of face-to-face instruction. Indeed, the current attitude of leaders contributes to an organizational climate that impacts the adoption of these methods at higher educational institutions.

The author hypothesizes that a supportive organizational climate, one that cultivates an entrepreneurial orientation to using eLearning methods and supports the application of eLearning methods to real teaching and learning situations, contributes to effective institutionalization of eLearning methods. More specifically, the author proposes examining the relationship among entrepreneurial orientation of faculty, learning transfer climate of the institution, faculty self-efficacy in using eLearning Methodologies, and institutionalization of eLearning methodologies. The author presents a framework illustrating the proposed relationships among the variables.

Significance of the Study

First, with regard to HRD theory, this study seeks to understand, on a deeper level, how the organizational climate either supports or inhibits adaptation of new instructional methodologies. HRD research considers the larger context within which training programs operate (Leimbach & Baldwin, 1997) and the role of HRD practices in institutionalizing organizational change (Jacobs & Russ-Eft, 2000). This study intends to heighten understanding of how an organization’s learning transfer climate influences an employee’s ability and willingness to apply adapt e-learning methodologies in order to support broader organizational strategies.

Secondly, the study seeks to explore the value of fostering a high level of self-efficacy in using new methods to achieve desired performance. Social cognitive theory posits that a triadic reciprocal causation model in which behavior, cognitions, and the environment all influences each other in a dynamic fashion (Bandura, 1977, 1986). The self-efficacy construct that will be used in this study is derived from social cognitive theory. The line of questioning in this study related to self-efficacy will promote a better understanding of the relationship between an individual’s attitudes about their ability to transfer learning to the job and their perceived ability to use new methods in practice.

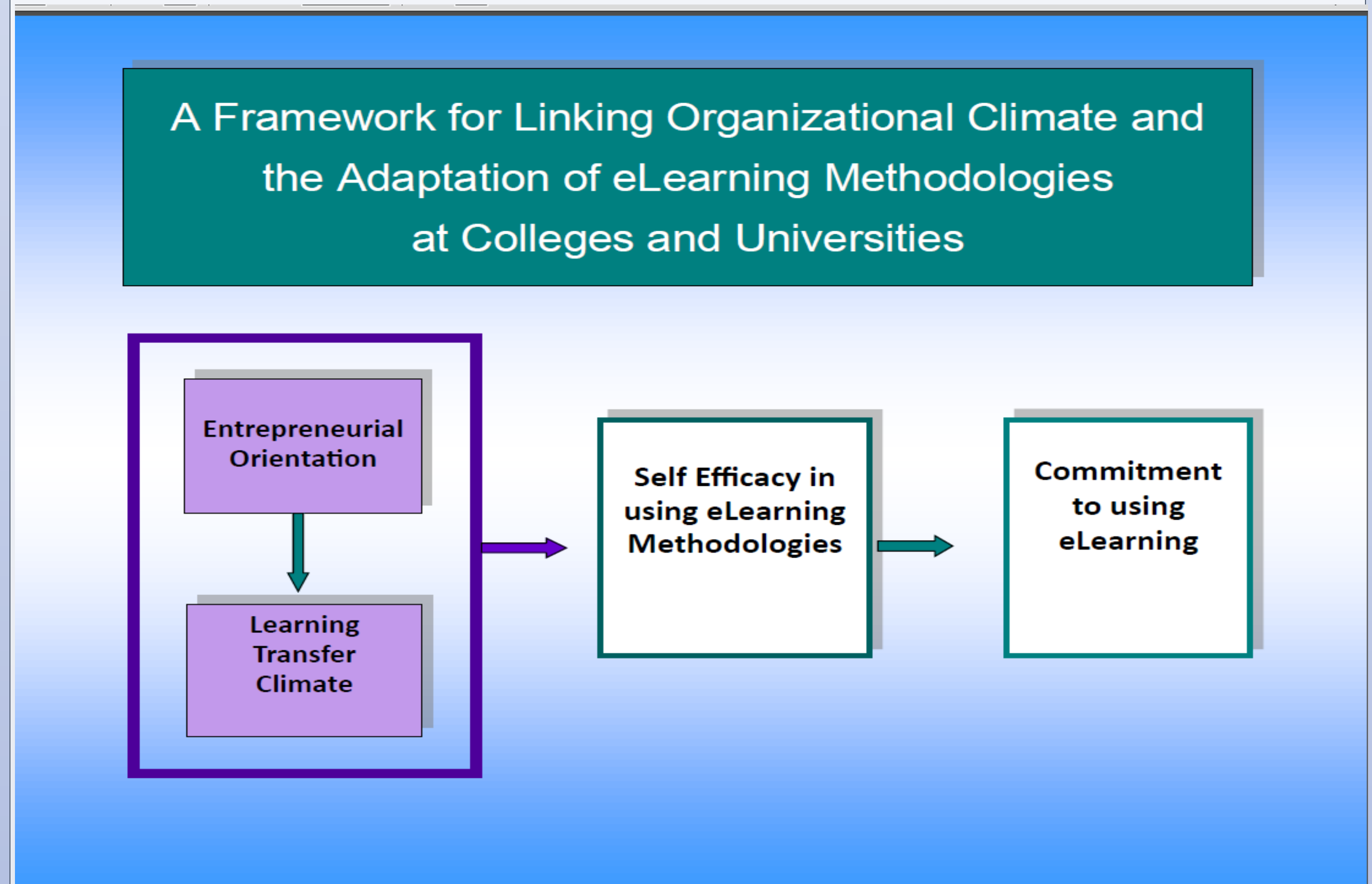
Lastly, this study may contribute to HRD practitioners’ efforts to design and target more effective and efficient HRD solutions intended to transfer learning to their job in their efforts to institutionalize boarder organizational change. The approaches used in this study may highlight areas HRD practitioners can focus their intervening efforts in order to bring about successful organizational change.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses for this study are:

1. Organizations that have a high entrepreneurial orientation will have more supportive learning transfer climate.
2. Organizations that have a high entrepreneurial orientation and more supportive transfer climate will experience higher levels of Faculty self efficiency in using eLearning Methodologies.
3. Individuals who demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy in using eLearning methodologies, will demonstrate higher levels of commitment to institutionalization of eLearning methodologies.
4. The effects of entrepreneurial orientation Faculty commitment to using eLearning outcomes will be partially mediated by the transfer climate and level of self-efficacy of individuals in using eLearning methods.

Figure 1



Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions to the key terms and variables in the study. The terms for this study have been operationally defined as follows:

Learning Transfer Climate

Learning transfer climate is the sense of imperative (Schneider & Rentsch, 1988) that arises from a person's perceptions of his or her work environment, and that influences the extent to which that person can use learned skills on the job (Holton, Bates, Seyler, & Carvalho, 1997).

Self-efficacy

Beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997).

Transfer self-efficacy

Beliefs in one's capabilities to maintain newly learned knowledge and skill over time and to generalize new knowledge and skills to novel contexts and settings (Richman, 1999).

Goal Commitment

The determination of employees to try for a goal and the willingness to put forth effort to attain a goal (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987; Hollenbeck, Williams, & Klein, 1989; Hollenbeck, Klein, O'Leary & Wright, 1989). In this context the goal would be committing to using eLearning Methodologies.

Entrepreneurial orientation

The processes, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry. It is composed of three dimensions: innovativeness, proactive efforts, and risk-taking. The related scales have been developed by Covin and Slevin (1989).

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